

FINDINGS: The government of Iran continues to engage in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom, including prolonged detention, torture, and executions based primarily or entirely upon the religion of the accused. Iran is a constitutional, theocratic republic that discriminates against its citizens on the basis of religion or belief. During the past year, the Iranian government's poor religious freedom record deteriorated, especially for religious minorities such as Baha'is, Christians and Sufi Muslims, and physical attacks, harassment, detention, arrests, and imprisonment intensified. Even the recognized non-Muslim religious minorities – Jews, Armenian and Assyrian Christians, and Zoroastrians – protected under Iran's constitution faced increasing discrimination and repression. Dissident Muslims were increasingly subject to abuse and several were sentenced to death and even executed for the capital crime of *moharebeh* ("waging war against God).” A revised penal code that would codify serious punishments, including the death penalty, for converts from Islam remains under consideration by the Iranian parliament. Heightened anti-Semitism and repeated Holocaust denials by senior government officials have increased fear among Iran's Jewish community. Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, members of minority religious communities have fled Iran in significant numbers for fear of persecution.

Since 1999, the State Department has designated Iran as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). The Commission recommends in 2010 that Iran again be designated as a CPC.

Since the disputed June 12, 2009 elections, human rights and religious freedom conditions in Iran have regressed to a point not seen since the early days of the Islamic revolution. Killings, arrests, and physical abuse of detainees have increased, including for religious minorities and Muslims who dissent or express views perceived as threatening the legitimacy of the government. The Iranian government has repressed its citizens on the basis of religious identity for years. However, in recent months it has increasingly manipulated the reach of its religious laws to silence, and in some cases put to death, Shi'a Muslims simply for exercising their internationally protected rights to freedom of expression and freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS: The U.S. government should invoke IRFA's statutory provisions by identifying those Iranian officials and entities responsible for severe religious freedom violations and imposing travel bans and asset freezes on those individuals. The U.S. government should also work with its European allies to do the same. Current U.S. policy on human rights in Iran has primarily relied on the issuance of statements or reports, and USCIRF concludes that it is now time to go further and take concrete policy action against human rights violations in Iran. USCIRF urges the U.S. government to continue to vigorously speak out, including during P5+1 talks and in any other formal or informal bilateral or multilateral fora, about deteriorating human rights and religious freedom conditions, and to demand the release of all prisoners of conscience. In addition, the U.S. government should use appropriated funds to advance Internet freedom and protect Iranian activists from harassment and arrest by developing new technologies and immediately distributing proven and field-tested programs to counter censorship. Additional recommendations for U.S. policy toward Iran can be found in the 2010 Annual Report chapter on Iran and by following this link:
<http://www.uscifr.gov/images/ar2010/iran2010.pdf>